UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.4
8 April 2002

Original: ENGLISH

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
First session
New York, 13-24 May 2002
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: AN INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Information received from the United Nations system

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP) AND INDIGENOUS ISSUES

I. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a United Nations organization which promotes and supports programmes for sustainable human development. It is the principal provider of development advice, advocacy and grant support to developing countries of the United Nations. With 132 country offices worldwide, the UNDP commitment to a universal presence has proven especially useful in post-conflict situations and with States that had otherwise been isolated from the international community.

2. In September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders pledged to reduce the proportion of peoples living in poverty by half by the year 2015. Moreover, the Secretary-General, and the results of a high-level ministerial meeting, affirmed the leading role of UNDP in the United Nations initiatives in achieving this goal.

3. UNDP provides developing countries with knowledge-based consulting services and builds national, regional and global coalitions for change. It works in partnership with Governments, United Nations specialized agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs) and private-sector institutions to implement economic and social development programmes. Its areas

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of specialized expertise are in democratic governance, pro-poor policies, energy and environment, peace-building and disaster mitigation, HIV/AIDS, and information and communications technology. UNDP also engages in extensive advocacy work on poverty issues. Its widely cited *Human Development Report* stimulates international and national debate on key development issues ranging from poverty and globalization to human rights.

4. Improving partnerships is another key element of the UNDP mandate for the future. As stated by UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown, partnership amongst development actors is a precondition for development effectiveness. The challenge for UNDP is to move the institution into a highly networked organization which creates new development opportunities through strategic partnerships. In doing so, UNDP is seeking to build stronger partnerships with civil society and indigenous peoples and their organizations as a basis for promoting alternatives to conventional development thinking.

5. UNDP engagement with indigenous peoples at the country level is extensive. Since the inauguration of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People in 1993, many of the UNDP small grant programmes and regional and nationally executed programmes have involved indigenous peoples' communities. These initiatives have focused on poverty eradication, environmental conservation, conflict prevention and resolution, and cultural revitalization. In addition, UNDP supported projects under the Indigenous Knowledge Programme (IKP) whose main objective was to promote indigenous knowledge and protect indigenous intellectual property through targeted capacity building and direct support for projects formulated and implemented by indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs).

6. UNDP support of and commitment to policy formulation for indigenous peoples and the promotion of indigenous knowledge in the development process also began in 1993 and was set forth in its 1994 publication, *Conserving Indigenous Knowledge: Integrating Two Systems of Innovation,* published by RAFI (Rural Advancement Foundation International). Furthermore, between 1994 and 1995 UNDP funded a series of regional consultations with IPOs on support to the preservation of indigenous peoples' knowledge and the protection of indigenous intellectual property. The objective was to identify the strategies and means of promoting and protecting indigenous knowledge, intellectual and cultural property, and customary practices.

7. Coinciding with the midpoint of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004), UNDP reactivated its indigenous peoples portfolio in 1999. UNDP conducted internal and external stocktaking processes aimed at assessing UNDP status in regard to its engagement with indigenous peoples and in relation to the activities of other multilateral and bilateral agencies, and held two consultations aimed at discussing indigenous peoples' priority issues, the UNDP comparative advantage and ways to build a partnership with IPOs based on trust and confidence, and to raise the awareness of UNDP staff on indigenous peoples' issues. These studies and consultations laid the groundwork for the development of a policy guidance note entitled "UNDP and indigenous peoples: a policy of engagement", endorsed in August 2001 and launched at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa.

II. GLOBAL PROGRAMMES

Small grants programmes

8. Much of UNDP support at the country level to indigenous peoples is channelled through small grant programmes. The grants tend to be of small amounts ranging from US$ 5,000 to US$ 100,000. These programmes, like the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP), seek to promote consensus building and participatory decision-making processes. They are designed and implemented in a decentralized manner, and participatory management structures are an integral component of these kinds of initiatives. Each programme is required to help form a National Selection Committee (NSC) with representatives from CSOs, Governments and UNDP. NSCs have the authority and responsibility for the overall coordination of programme activities and formulation of criteria for project selection. NSCs offer country offices an opportunity to conduct a dialogue with NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) actively involved in grass-roots development.

9. GEF, a programme to help developing countries protect the environment, primarily aims at protecting biological diversity. In part through GEF, UNDP can jointly address indigenous peoples and biodiversity. GEF/SGP, launched in 1992 by UNDP, is designed to address the needs of local communities. It provides grants and other support to community-based groups for activities that address local problems related to the GEF areas of concern.

10. In Guatemala, for example, a GEF/SGP project on alternative conflict resolution and environmental mediation aims to provide local community leaders, indigenous peoples' representatives, and government and municipal authorities with access to innovative and alternative methods of socio-environmental conflict resolution. Workshops have brought various stakeholders together. Training manuals have been translated into the native languages of the indigenous peoples. This project is an example of how GEF/SGP provides positive anti-discriminatory support through training on alternative methods of conflict resolution to different stakeholders in a protected area where indigenous peoples are in a weak position and discriminated against by the national system (in education, understanding of legal mechanisms, etc.).

11. In Nepal, an alpine biodiversity conservation project is based in Jumla district, a week's walk from the capital. The average life expectancy in Jumla is 44 years, which is 11 years less than the national average. The project supports the indigenous peoples of the Kami community. The project seeks to conserve the rare and highly valued medicinal plants, as natural resources exploitation is a main problem, with plants being a major export commodity. The project also aimed to create livelihoods through a revolving fund, planting medicinal herbs, and capacity-building. In this case GEF/SGP, under an alpine conservation project, is also providing alternatives to this very remote and disadvantaged community, which is defined by the mainstream as "untouchable".

HURIST programme

12. The Human Rights Strengthening (HURIST) programme, a joint initiative of UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), is currently entering its

second phase. Among its objectives is to develop partnerships with indigenous peoples and their organizations. This marks an important step towards implementing the new UNDP policy on engagement with indigenous peoples. Three pilot programmes focusing on building the capacity of IPOs are to be designed over the next two years.

The Indigenous Knowledge Programme

13. In 1994 UNDP collaborated with the Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Network to create IKP with support from the International Development Research Centre, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Government of Norway, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. It was a global programme partially funded by UNDP, but executed by local NGOs and CBOs. An evaluation of IKP underlining lessons learned was conducted in 2000.

14. UNDP supported three projects: two in Malaysia and one in South America. The project in Borneo, Malaysia, involved the adaptation and the continuation of the practice of traditional agricultural systems based on indigenous knowledge and innovations to serve the needs of today's community. The second, the Putan Project for Communal Forest Conservation, was an agro-forestry project aimed at improving the quality of life of the longhouse communities by protecting the forest and land from the encroachment of logging companies, plantation schemes or neighbouring communities. The South American project took place in the Amazonian forest of Yana Yacu Sacha in Ecuador. Its aim was to recover and develop indigenous knowledge for the conservation of the ecosystems and biodiversity of the forest. It was successful in creating a sustainable development model based on traditional indigenous knowledge in the Amazon.

III. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

15. UNDP also supports indigenous peoples in its regional and nationally executed development programme activities. Many of these programmes have tended to focus on one or more of the following areas: improvement of living standards, economic and technological development, preservation of natural resources and environmental conservation, and conflict prevention.

Regional programmes

16. A good example of a UNDP regional programme is the Southeast Asian Regional Programme: Highland Peoples' Programme (HPP) that covered four different countries in the Mekong Sub-Region, Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, where at least 11 million indigenous people live. The programme worked closely with IPOs and focused on poverty reduction by applying a participatory, decentralized and localized bottom-up approach to the development of an area with indigenous peoples. It established exchange mechanisms and procedures to encourage dialogue and the sharing of experiences and information between multiple stakeholders, i.e. Government and IPOs, regarding highland peoples' development at regional, national and local levels. The programme made substantial achievements in terms of capacity building in highland communities and the government support structure and, in addition, contributed to policy-making. In Cambodia, HPP focused on support to the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the development of policy guidelines

for highland peoples' development. The formulation of guidelines took place with wide participation from the grass roots level to the central level, as well as with regional input. The guidelines, though, remain to be approved by the Government.

17. In efforts to implement the newly endorsed UNDP policy of engagement with indigenous peoples, a regional programme is being developed that builds on the prior work of HPP. Its focus will be on strengthening policy dialogue on indigenous peoples' rights and development and will encompass a number of other indigenous peoples besides highland peoples in the region. Such a region-wide initiative aims at continuing the work of the second phase of HPP, which centred on the right to development, albeit in a more integrated capacity and addressing the holistic aspects of the right to development. Moreover, this reformulated initiative has received added impetus from the Millennium Declaration urging countries to focus and intensify efforts to halve the proportion of peoples living in poverty by the year 2015. Given that poverty remains a persistent obstacle to the development of indigenous peoples, a specific focus on poverty reduction strategies vis-à-vis such groups is of particular significance at this point in time.

18. Three general areas of concern are to be tackled. They are: (a) issues with respect to ownership and use of land and natural resources, including related issues of environmental management; (b) cultural autonomy, including issues of language, education, and protection of cultural and intellectual property; and (c) participation in formal decision-making processes of the State, particularly with respect to development, which also invokes issues of citizenship.

National programmes

19. National programmes focusing on conflict prevention and peace building in Guatemala and the Philippines illustrate how UNDP provided the space to negotiate and facilitate peace processes in different regions.

20. In Guatemala, after 36 years of human insecurity, repression, social exclusion and lost opportunities, CSOs and IPOs played an active role in negotiating peace by promoting informal linkages between the opposing parties and helping to define the major issues and build consensus. UNDP supported the establishment of the Civil Society Assembly charged with discussion of the substantive issues, formulation of specific proposals based on consensus, and review of the peace agreements. UNDP ensured that space was created so that the perspectives of indigenous peoples and their organizations were brought to national attention. The Assembly helped to overcome distrust, promote broad participation and move the country away from confrontation.

21. In the Philippines, after the enactment of the 1997 Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), local feuds over land ownership broke out among residents in ancestral domain areas of the Cordillera region. Women, using indigenous knowledge systems, emerged as leaders in settling disputes, forming the Pan-Cordillera Women's Network for Peace and Development. UNDP and this network helped to train women volunteers to lead community groups, as well as local government units to prepare development plans for their ancestral domains. The volunteers played a lead role in mapping boundaries and fostering peace pacts among communities.

IV. UNDP AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: A POLICY OF ENGAGEMENT

22. The lessons learned from country and regional engagement together with global and regional consultations with IPOs fed into and informed the new UNDP policy of engagement on indigenous peoples. Underpinned by the international human rights framework, the policy recognizes indigenous peoples' rights and their vital role and contribution to development.

23. Rooted in the goals articulated at the Millennium Summit, the objective of the policy is to guide the work of UNDP in building sustainable partnerships with indigenous peoples and their organizations so as to reduce poverty and attain peace. More specifically, these partnerships are aimed at fostering an enabling environment that: promotes indigenous peoples' participation in all decision-making levels; ensures the coexistence of their economic, cultural and socio-political systems with others; and develops the capacity of Governments to build more inclusive policies and programmes. The policy also addresses the debilitating incidence of human poverty in most indigenous communities as a visible evidence of discrimination (unequal access to productive resources and basic social services), if not exclusion. Issues related to ownership and use of land and natural resources, education and health, protection of cultural and intellectual property, and participation are to be tackled in the context of poverty reduction strategies that fully take into account the rights of indigenous peoples.

24. The rationale for UNDP engagement with indigenous peoples and their organizations is grounded in UNDP's mandated areas of work, processes and agreements of development cooperation, and the aspirations of indigenous peoples. The UNDP coordinating role at the country level, its human development paradigm, advocacy of democratic governance and policy of mainstreaming human rights positions make it a key partner for pursuing a more holistic approach to development. Moreover, the UNDP country and regional presence and the relationship of trust it has with Governments and civil society partners enables UNDP to play a unique role in bringing together different stakeholders in development processes. This mandate can serve as a critical entry point and foundation for supporting more inclusive development policies and programmes, brokering dialogues with all actors, facilitating participatory approaches, and creating the political space for alternative views to be shared.

If you would like more information on any of the UNDP activities relating to indigenous peoples, please contact either the UNDP country office in your country or the CSO Team in the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships (BRSP) at UNDP headquarters in New York at:

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